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Mediatalk: When a subordinate asked Post executive editor Ben Bradlee why he hired Pulitzer Prize-winner Haynes Johnson away from the Star in 1970, he replied, "When that kind of horseflesh comes on the market, you take it." Well, the stable door is ajar, and Johnson shows signs of an eagerness to graze elsewhere. He had serious talks with the Detroit News about succeeding Jerry terHorst as Washington bureau chief (the slot eventually went to AP's Walter Mears) and press plane buddies get the distinct impression it won't be long before he lands elsewhere—most likely in a magazine position. Why Johnson's discontent? Reliable reports are that he feels "misused and unused" by the Post, and that he has become "a thumb-sucker rather than a reporter." Johnson's main contribution to Post pages the past two years have been windy mood pieces and sidebar comments that contain many adjectives but few substantive facts. And a print Severeid he is not. "The tragedy," according to one Post colleague, "is that Bradlee wasted a damned fine reporter. He wanted Johnson for his name, not for what he could get out of him." . . . New York news-

paper types say the Des Moines Register has the inside track for the big Pulitzer this year for their excellent coverage of the food crisis and scandals in the Agriculture Department. Although the bureau's work doesn't get much attention on the East Coast, it has done an exceptional job in showing how the food industry works. If the Pulitzer comes through, congratulations to Clark Mollenhoff, George Anthon, and James Risser, and eat your hearts out New York Times and Washington Post. . . . Look for the Star-News to make a major effort under new editor Jim Bellows to build up the Sunday paper. A good possibility is a Sunday magazine similar to "Calendar," the Sunday section Bellows put out at the Los Angeles Times. It would include some of the arts material now appearing in the Star-News "Portfolio" section and probably would mean the deep-sinking of "NOW," the Saturday magazine. Bellows also plans major design changes in the daily paper and will move columnists Mary McGrory and Tom Dowling to a regular slot on page A-3.